



CITY COUNCIL

Public Works Committee

Monday, March 17, 2008
Meeting Report

Attendance: M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, Chair; D. Sterner, S. Fuhs

Others Attending: V. Spencer, K. Zeiber, C. Jones, S. McCracken, M. Boykins, L. Kelleher, D. Binder

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz, Chair, called the Public Works Committee meeting to order at 5 pm.

I. Orange and Cherry St Lot

Mr. Zeiber provided some background and explained that several blighted properties on this block were demolished. In the late 1990's a partnership with the United Way was formed to create a neighborhood parklet that would offer some seating, off-street parking, and a tot lot. He explained that all properties on that block were owned by the City. The remaining parcel is owned by another party and used by the WIN Outlet for employee parking. He stated that the City was to retain ownership of the parklet with the Parking Authority managing the off-street parking area and leasing the spaces to interested residents. This plan fell apart as the staff reduction in the Public Works Department left the Department unable to provide maintenance and no neighborhood group came forward to take responsibility for the maintenance.

Mr. Spencer stated that he was recently approached by St. James Church, who is willing to take responsibility for the lot.

Ms. Kelleher displayed the park plan created by Design Works in the late 1990's. After reviewing the plan, Rev. McCracken, pastor at St. James Church, suggested fencing the parklet in as done by PAL on Walnut St. He stated that this would keep the area secured from unsupervised activity. He stated that St. James Church would agree to allow other churches and other organizations to use the parklet.

Mr. Zeiber stated that in addition to demolition, the City graded the lot and installed street lights. He questioned if this parcel would be transferred to St. James Church or retained by the City.

Rev. McCracken stated that St. James is open to the City's desire.

Mr. Spencer noted the need to obtain to a project estimate and speak with the Community Development Department about available funding.

Mr. Boykins questioned the availability of Weed and Seed funding noting other projects have been funded to improve the community.

Mr. Spencer questioned the limited public access for projects funding by CDBG dollars. He noted the complaints received about the fenced play lot adjacent to 10th & Penn Elementary School that was funded by CDBG money.

Mr. Sterner and Mr. Fuhs both noted their support for installation of a parklet on the Orange and Cherry St lot.

Mr. Sterner suggested approaching WIN Outlet about obtaining the remaining parcel. He noted the availability of approximately \$400,000 in the CDBG area to date. Ms. Kelleher reminded all of the repeated warnings by Mr. Lingle and Triad Associates about only funding CDBG projects that are ready to move forward and have completed engineering studies which avoids delays in spending monies allocated. Rev. McCracken stated that St. James Church is ready as soon as the money is made available.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she remembered the original project and recalled the numerous stall-outs caused by personnel changes both internal and external. She noted that this parklet will improve the area and uplift the condominiums on Penn St.

Mr. Zeiber agreed noting the parcel is currently plagued by drug trafficking.

The Public Works Committee asked the Administration to begin looking at finding funding for this project and speaking with United Way to see if they are interested in participating. The Public Works Committee also asked the Administration to explore the City's ability to obtain ownership of the remaining parcel. The Administration is expected to report at the May Public Works Committee meeting.

II. Street Light Update

Mr. Jones reported that the East Bank project is complete. Upon assessment staff recommended placing an additional light in the center of Nottingham Court. He added that Public Works will also be restoring the street damage caused by the trenches. Mr. Jones also noted that the light fixtures were selected by the community.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the spectacular improvement caused by the lighting of the monuments in City Park. Mr. Zeiber stated that staff is currently working to repair the wiring at the Fire Memorial. He added that a street light assessment is scheduled within the next few weeks. Staff will go out and observe and report on the burned out lighting City-wide. After the assessment, the repair work will be assigned to the City's electrician.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the inactive street light pole above the playground in Neversink Park. She noted the need for the street light assessment to include the City's parks and playgrounds.

III. Committee Goals

Mr. Jones noted that the goals on the Committee's agenda were obtained from the Public Works budget.

Mr. Fuhs noted his interest with Goal 1 – review and recommendation for adoption of a Storm Water Management Ordinance to comply with PA DEP regulations, Goal 8 – insure timely implementation of Capital Improvements Plan projects, Goal 11 – review consent order, operation, and maintenance plan and Goal 12 – create storm water utility.

Mr. Jones stated that the storm water utility pre-feasibility study has determined that the creation of a utility fee is legally possible in Pennsylvania. He stated that the next RFP will find a consultant to manage the project. He explained that the storm water utility fee will charge property owners on impervious surface.

The Committee next discussed the benefit of establishing a storm water utility fee which will cover the cost of services such as street sweeping, storm sewer cleaning and repairs, etc.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to have a forum discussion on Goal 9 – strengthening recreation activities and program. She noted the proposed amendment to the Ordinance prepared by Ms. Kelleher and Mr. Zeiber which expands the service of City-wide recreation organizations.

The Public Works Committee requested that Mr. Zeiber contact Olivet's, the YMCA, and United Way about their willingness to participate. Mr. Zeiber was asked to report back at the May meeting.

Mr. Spencer asked Ms. Kelleher to describe the old program coordinated by the Reading School District and the City. Ms. Kelleher explained that in 2000, the City and School District partnered to create all-day, summer recreation programs in four of the City's elementary schools. These all-day programs combined the services of the City's recreation division, the School District, Olivet's, PAL, the YMCA, the foodbank, the Conference of Churches, etc. The Committee had the pilot program up and running within a year's time due to the support of School Superintendent Dr. Ruben Flores. After Dr. Jamula was hired by the School District to replace Dr. Flores, the School District withdrew from the partnership.

Mr. Spencer stated that this partnership brought all organizations that provide recreational programs together. He urged the Public Works Committee to begin discussing a similar coordinated recreational focus City-wide.

IV. Consent Decree Update

The Public Works Committee reviewed the design timeline submitted by the Administration. Mr. Jones stated that he does not recommend fast-tracking the design phase which is expected to take up to a year. He expressed his belief that the construction completion deadline will not be moved forward by the Department of Justice. He stated the RFP for a project manager and construction manager will go out this week. The project manager will be expected to take the lead on the funding of the project.

Mr. Sterner inquired if federal dollars are available to assist with the waste water treatment plant project. Mr. Jones stated that federal dollars were available in the 1960's and 1970's but not now. He stated that the City will now need to seek funding from a variety of sources and contact any and all available options. He stated that the award of contract for the project manager is slated for the May 12th Council meeting. He explained that the City cannot re-bid the design phase. He noted that the firm selected to design the project cannot be selected as the project or construction manager. However, if another independent company bids on both the project and construction manager, one company could win both awards.

Mr. Jones noted the need to begin preliminary engineering. He explained that the benchmark testing will prove that the treatment application is functional.

Mr. Fuhs inquired if the firms bidding on the design phase were able to submit their own designs for the new waste water treatment plant. Mr. Jones replied that the design method was defined in the RFP after it was approved by the Department of Justice.

Mr. Spencer expressed the belief that several different design applications could be used for the project. Mr. Jones agreed but noted that the design method was built around the needs of the plant and its users. He explained that the Department of Justice approved the design technique based on alternative analysis

provided early on. He explained that this analysis took one year and used a process to explore available options.

Mr. Spencer noted that the field survey is scheduled on the timeline for the second quarter of 2008. He noted that as the Administration met the project schedule, there was no need for an emergency procurement.

Mr. Fuhs noted the need to expand the City's options which will enable the best available technique to be used.

Mr. Spencer noted that at a previous meeting, the Administration admitted that Black and Veatch had participated in assisting the Public Works Department with the alternative analysis and creating the design submitted to the Department of Justice for approval. He noted that this admission justifies his past inquiries about the openness of the process.

There was next a discussion on the need to have the project manager in place before awarding the design phase contract to Black and Veatch. The Committee noted the need to have a project manager on board to provide input during the design phase.

Mr. Sterner agreed noting that the project manager could make small changes to improve the design or save the City money. Mr. Jones noted that the City cannot go back to the alternative analysis phase and select a different technique. He explained the use of value engineering by an independent team to assess the project and make any necessary changes.

The Public Works Committee insisted on delaying the award of contract to Black and Veatch until a project manager is brought on board. Mr. Jones stated that the Administration does not recommend the delay.

Mr. Spencer stated that if the project design can be tweaked through value engineering, why can't project manager make any changes earlier. Mr. Jones explained that value engineering is completed with the project is 80-85% complete.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired if any alterations can be made to the timeline. Mr. Jones stated that the Department of Justice will only allow changes to the timeline in extreme situations, such as flooding or if other acts of God occur.

Mr. Spencer stated that the consent decree also requires the City to make corrections to the collection system by 2012. He questioned why the Administration would design improvements to the waste water treatment plant before understanding and making the necessary corrections to the collections system. The collections system has a large effect on the treatment process.

Mr. Jones stated that corrections to the main sewer interceptors are required by 2012. He stated that some of that study is underway. He stated that the new plant will be designed to treat 30-35 mpg of material and provide for flow increase during peaks created by storm events.

Mr. Jones then asked that the award of contract to Black and Veatch occur at the upcoming Council meeting as the GIS work needs to occur now. He stated that the value engineering will be provided by the project manager when the plant is 80-85% complete. He noted the difficulties staff had in drafting the various RFPs for this project. Ms. Kelleher inquired why staff had difficulties drafting RFPs as assistance was provided by Black and Veatch.

As no other business was brought forward, the Public Works Committee meeting adjourned at 7 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Linda Kelleher, City Clerk